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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 001483

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E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: RADIO ADDRESSES ILLUMINATE CORREA

REF: QUITO 1046

Classified By: PolOff Erik Martini for reasons 1.4 (b&d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa has given 23 Saturday radio addresses. The extemporaneous and unscripted nature of the addresses gives an idea of the issues he is thinking about and his own personal character. Embodiments have listened to recordings of the last 13 of these addresses. The addresses reveal Correa at his most ideological and rhetorically fiery, a posture that has not been fully reflected to date in the more pragmatically tempered actions of his government. This cable outlines the format of the addresses, common themes and possible clues into Correa's thoughts. End Summary.

BACKGROUND AND ATMOSPHERICS

¶2. (U) Shortly after his inauguration, President Rafael Correa began to give weekly radio addresses every Saturday. Broadcast from different cities around the country, they follow a regular, two-part format: an introductory speech summarizing his weekly activities and giving his reflections on current events and then a question and answer period from the audience, which generally consists of members of the press and local civil society special-interest groups. His Communications Secretary, Monica Chuji, gives a summary and occasionally an introduction in Quichua. The addresses are extemporaneous. For the weekly summary, Correa appears to read from his agenda, digressing on certain events when he wants to make a point. While some questions from the audience can be easy and sycophantic there have been a fair number of hostile and challenging questions. The first addresses lasted barely an hour, but recent addresses have stretched to well over two hours. Following is a summary of some of Correa's key and recurring themes.

IN FAVOR OF DECENTRALIZATION?

¶3. (C) Correa sends mixed signals on whether he's a decentralist or supportive of a strong central government. He is against regional autonomy for Ecuador, various ethnicities, claiming that we're one state in response to a question on indigenous autonomy. In an escalating feud with Guayaquil Mayor Jaime Nebot, Correa emphasizes that the competence to grant a port concession should belong to the central government. Similarly, he says that a bridge leading into Guayaquil was paid with central government funds and Guayaquil cannot control the traffic on it. He has advocated that the country be split into about seven "regional" governments, with equal populations, economies and

characteristics - but has not made clear the degree of autonomy that would accompany (or not) this formula. At one point he said "(i)n this country, everything is backwards - the central government does things the local government should do and local governments do things the central government should do."

A CALL FOR CITIZEN ACTIVISM; RESPECT FOR THE PRESIDENCY

14. (C) Correa called for civil society to take action against the allegedly corrupt banks by bringing lawsuits against them. He exhorted citizens to complain to municipalities when there were high electricity prices or problems. A minor scandal erupted when a citizen made an obscene gesture at the presidential motorcade and was thrown in prison: Correa said the jailing was within the law and he "would make the people respect the majesty of the Presidency."

PUBLIC OVERSIGHT OF THE PUBLIC TRUST

15. (C) A common theme Correa has hit upon lately is his frustration with private insertion into the management of what he calls "public goods." His voice rising, he decries the involvement of private business entities in governance on public corporate boards. He particularly relishes connecting the Banking Board to private banking interests and pointing out that the Guayaquil Civic Board has a representative from the Guayaquil Chamber of Production. He says "we will make the state public again, not directed by private entities."

THE LONG, SAD, DARK NEO-LIBERAL NIGHT

16. (C) Correa's favorite phrase, repeated in almost every radio address, is to attribute some sort of problem to the "long, sad, dark neo-liberal night." Examples include, "this crazy, long, sad, dark, neo-liberal night which said all that's private is better than public ownership." On capital flight: "(banks) send capital to Miami, this is part of the long, dark neo-liberal night." On the current electricity system: "the previous system, like France's, was good, but the current system is a disaster, a product of the long, sad, dark, neo-liberal night." Another common epithet used interchangeably with this phrase is "Washington Consensus" or "international bureaucracy."

NATIONAL PRIDE AND SOVEREIGNTY

17. (C) Referring to the GOE's prickly response to the UNITAS exercises (reftel), Correa said, "The SouthCom commander thinks we're a colony but we're pulling out of this; we're a sovereign nation."8 In describing his healthcare plan, Correa emphasizes the need for healthcare independence and reliance on Ecuadorian funding and Ecuadorian doctors; he said Ecuador was "subsidizing" Chile when its expensively trained doctors go there to find work. Correa would like to see an Ecuadorian movie industry developed to promote movies like acclaimed Ecuadorian film "Que Tan Lejos", not, in his words, "'Spiderman' and this kind of thing."8 He said Ecuador should preserve its own traditions: "Invite me to an 'Old Year' (ano viejo) party, not Halloween." In proclaiming his wife would not head INNFA, as Ecuadorian First Ladies traditionally have in the past, Correa said the practice was "anti-democratic"8 and in this respect, the U.S. could learn something from Ecuador. Talking about gangs, he exhorted youth to "leave these problems to the developed countries."8

THE DEMAND FOR DEVELOPED NATIONS' "CO-RESPONSIBILITY"

18. (C) In several radio addresses, Correa has proposed a theory of "co-responsibility" in the environment and development. Ecuador's exploitation of its oil fields could be averted for the good of the world if first world countries would take "co-responsibility" and pay Ecuador not to extract the oil. He claims that the production of oxygen should be compensated by the developed world and that it should pay "not just for things with a price, but for things with value." Similarly, describing a commercial deal with the European Union, Correa said it was not a free trade

agreement, but one of "co-responsibility" to include some trade measures but also some development assistance.

BASHING THE PRESS

¶9. (C) Correa lately spends considerable time criticizing the press. He says the media owners mistreat reporters, and are unaccountable for errors. Correa has claimed that the media is run by &mafias,⁸ owned by banking titans, and that much of its reporting is motivated by business and political interests. Correa asserts that he supports a free press, but that it must be accurate and accountable for its mistakes. He claims merely to be defending the truth and that he must fight against the lies to defend his integrity. When Correa has been criticized for inhibiting freedom of expression, he responds that the real lack of freedom of expression is at the level of the working reporter who is fired if he tries to publish something that does not support the entrenched interests. Correa claims that he will not harass all journalists that criticize him, but &only those that LIE. I,m an academic and I,m accustomed to debate and those that don,t agree with me. But not those that lie.⁸

CORREA'S FAMILY AND BACKGROUND

¶10. (C) When speaking of his wife and children, Correa says that he thinks of his duties as a husband and father even more than his role as president. He says that children must feel useful in addition to feeling loved; the child that sits in his room, with a servant "bringing him Guitig (a bottled sparkling water) will feel loved but not useful."

¶11. (C) When speaking of his childhood, Correa unabashedly outlines hard times. When he was five years old, his father left for the U.S. When Correa was 18, he learned that his father was imprisoned in the U.S. for drug trafficking. During his father's absence, his mother worked in a grocery store and young Rafael had to deliver soup for extra money. Correa says he gained an understanding of the challenges of poverty, migration, unemployment that can lead one to become a drug mule and then suffer disproportionately severe punishment while drug kingpins remain free. When Lucio Gutierrez rashly charged that Correa came from a family of narcos, Correa asked "how can you try to blame me for my father?" to resounding applause.

CORREA ASKS PEOPLE TO "BE PATIENT"

¶12. (C) Many of the questions in Correa,s most recent addresses have been from local members of the audience asking about central government plans for infrastructure or other development progress. Questioners have pushed Correa for details about when the community can expect to receive its share of central government largesse or results on his other initiatives. Correa,s response has been to ask for patience and to point to how he has only been in office for a few months. In some cases, he is able to make an announcement or even ask his aides to draft up a decree for him to sign on the air.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) Substantively, Correa more than confirms his left of center tendencies in the radio addresses. But his discourse is not by any means a radical tirade against the U.S. In fact, Correa has only mentioned the U.S. in a couple radio addresses, and then only in passing. The only directly strident criticism of the U.S. government in the 13 radio addresses analyzed to date dealt with the UNITAS exercise cancellation. On a couple of occasions he even points out examples of how things are done in the U.S. in a positive way. He rarely mentions Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. During one address, Correa expresses admiration for Che Guevara, but he quickly said "not because I agree with all his ideas but because of the sacrifices he's made and his authenticity." Given the Che hero culture in much of Ecuador, such a statement seems very guarded.

¶14. (C) Correa reveals himself as a strident and skilled speaker, responding to questions on the fly and constructing creative arguments to support some of his more controversial positions. His sharp wit and intellect embolden him, making him unafraid of questions or challenges that don't agree with his own views: he readily takes them on, disagrees, curtly points out how the questioner is wrong, and even, in one case, asked a questioner to leave. He is not afraid to call some of the most powerful interests in Ecuador "corrupt" (bankers), "mediocre liars" (press, including specific prominent journalists) or "idiots" (a particularly strident questioner he booted from the forum). His academic nature demands that the press gives the right representation of his policies and statements, down to the last semantic nuance. His resentment of wealthy elites often surfaces on any topic.

¶15. (C) Correa's radio addresses portray a bold and popular President talking to the people about his passionate desire for change, so long in Ecuador thwarted by corruption and entrenched elites. Correa's frustration boils over and he has become at times increasingly harsh in his criticism of the forces against him. While still broadly popular, his supreme confidence in the morality of his cause can also come across as arrogant and intolerant. That element of his character has led to statements and actions that have already caused a dip in his favorability ratings, and will undoubtedly continue to both boost and test the staying power of his appeal with various segments of the Ecuadorian public.

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